

REPORT ON LANGUAGE TRAINING PROGRAM FOR YMCA STAFF MEMBERS

INTRODUCTION

Responsibility for running a special YMCA language training program was officially established with the adoption of the Montreal Association's Policy "The Y and the Montreal Fact" in September 1975. The objective of the program is to enable staff members to become functionally bilingual by 1979; that is, a level at which they will be able to understand, speak and read the second language sufficiently well to work in either language. Because of the time requirements of the work performed by Association personnel the program is designed to provide students with advance knowledge of the program's requirements (schedule, special events, immersions, etc).

75-76 FRENCH LANGUAGE CLASSES

For the 1975-1976 year, we contracted with the Downtown Branch to provide pedagogical advice and teachers for the program. At that time, 50 students were tested for ability, and four groups were formed. From September to December each group attended one 7-week session of two half-days per week; this schedule was adopted to avoid "emptying" the branches on any given day. Because most students were at the beginner level this schedule, with its long periods between courses, restricted their learning. In January, another series of tests was conducted, more homogeneous groups were formed, and the schedule was changed to avoid long interruptions between courses.

A week-end immersion course (30 hours of class time) was held with the intermediate II group to test the value of this kind of experience and to determine whether to repeat it.

The teaching methods used throughout the year were "Le Français International" (L.F.I.) and Dialogue Canada depending on the teacher's preference and skill. In ten months a total of 510 hours of class time was provided at a cost of \$16,500 (teachers' fees, cultural activities and week-end immersion).

Results of this first year's program were satisfactory for staff members who participated regularly and who had a certain ability to learn a second language, and these students were promoted to more advanced groups. On the other hand, some students did not progress; it was impossible to determine whether this was a result of poor attendance or lack of ability.

A summer immersion program was conducted to identify students with potential to learn a second language, in addition to testing new learning methods. The immersion was led by a teacher and an activities director and was held in a totally francophone environment. Students participated in formal classes and structured activities for 5 consecutive days. Two groups returned for a second immersion. We discovered that this method of learning is very effective if the program is tightly-organized and the students are prepared to work. The total cost of the summer immersion was \$8,350 (room and board, fees of teacher and activities director and miscellaneous costs of activities) for six groups of students.

76-77 FRENCH LANGUAGE CLASSES

The 76-77 program was developed during the summer based on conclusions drawn from the first year's program and immersions. To strengthen the program, the following problems were dealt with:

I Attendance

The importance of language training had not been sufficiently clarified and attendance was irregular.

II Schedules and Cost

- a) Students requested several cancellations because of heavy work loads, and as a result some groups went for as long as ten weeks with no classes and received fewer hours of instruction overall.
- b) Costs were fixed at \$1,050 for each 42-hour session, regardless of the number of students in the group.

III Instruction

- a) Only after Downtown Branch classes were staffed were teachers made available for the YMCA staff program.
- b) Neither a program nor a teacher were available for advanced-level students, and more and more students were moving to that level.
- c) Supervision of teachers was difficult because they were employees of the Downtown Branch.
- d) Reports on student progress, teaching methods, course outline were not available when needed

Most staff members by this time had been involved in some form of French Language training; some, either because of the low priority of French for their jobs and/or because of little progress, were not included in 1976-77 program. The remaining 30 students were tested and formed into groups; of this number only three were at the beginner level and the remainder were at either at intermediate or advanced levels, and it became necessary to develop a more sophisticated program directed at advanced levels.

Two teachers, one of whom had taught one of the summer immersion programs, were hired to teach the staff language program. Flexibility was a key factor in the development of the program and for this reason the year's schedule was made available to students one month prior to the beginning of classes.

A combination of teaching methods was used: LFI, En Français, Barson, Hoffman, La Parlure et le Pont sonore. Staff members were advised that language training was a priority and this greatly improved attendance.

Regular reports from teachers made it easier to make changes in teaching methods or scheduling where appropriate to meet the individual needs of students. Each group received a total of 20 hours of classes a month, made up of one half-day per week for 3 weeks and a full day in the last week. In January 77, changes were made in groups to enable some students to move to higher levels. Each group received a further 14 hours of instruction in intensive week-end programs.

Progress was more than satisfactory and the advanced group will complete its structured classes in June 1977. We expect the two intermediate groups to complete their training in May 1978.

The General Secretary and the Director of Operations were given private courses because of the irregular nature of their work schedules. Each received 120 hours of instruction. In a one-to-one teacher/student relationship progress was greatly accelerated, and this will be built on in the 1977-78 program.

The cost of the program was \$14,260 for 748 hours of instruction for all groups. An additional amount of \$1,050 was spent on classes for employees who did not take part in the staff program but who were given the opportunity to attend Downtown Branch classes.

77-78 FRENCH LANGUAGE CLASSES

Another summer immersion program will be held in June 77. The setting will once again be a francophone environment but, the format and schedule will be tighter. We have determined that the students would have benefited from more formal classroom hours in previous immersions - some of them even suggested it.

The schedule will therefore include three hours of classes in the morning, three hours in the afternoon, one and one half hour of organized activities and special presentations planned and conducted by the students in the evening.

As the Association progresses in the implementation of its Linguistic Policy the importance of French ability in certain positions is increasingly felt. The 1977-78 program will be accelerated for approximately 15 "priority staff members". Other staff members may participate in other language programs (the content of which will be approved by the Director of Linguistic Services) and will be reimbursed providing attendance and progress are satisfactory.

Private and semi-private classes will make up the program for September 1977 to May 1978. As previously mentioned, accelerated progress in such classes is possible because the teacher is able to spend more time helping students, according to their needs.

The June immersion at L'Auberge du P'tit Bonheur will cost approximately \$2,500 (room, board, teacher's fee, supplies). The September to May program is expected to cost \$17,000 for 900 hours of instruction.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE COURSES

From 1975 English courses have been available for Francophone staff members. Nine were tested and found to be at an advanced level, and it was agreed there was no need for their attending classes.

Today, two francophone employees are attending Downtown Branch classes, with the total cost being paid by the Association.

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